



TRANSITION TO ADULT LIFE FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

IMPORTANT: ELC's publications are intended to give you a general idea of the law. However, each situation is different. If, after reading our publications, you have questions about how the law applies to your particular situation, contact us for a referral, or contact an attorney of your choice.

Like all young people, students with disabilities must learn the skills they will need as adults. Some students with disabilities will attend college or a vocational school, some will function independently in the community, and some will need more help. Most will work, either in paid or subsidized jobs. What types of skills will the student need to learn, especially in high school, to be prepared for her adult life? We often talk about *annual* IEP goals and objectives, but as a child progresses through school, we must also think about long-range *life* goals and what the student must master to achieve those goals.

WHAT ARE TRANSITION SERVICES?

"Transition services" include a wide variety of objectives and services for students with a wide range of interests and abilities. Federal law defines transition services as a "coordinated set of activities" and a "results-oriented" process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child and helping the child move from school to life after school. Transition planning must be "based on the child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests."

A **coordinated set of activities** means a multi-year planning process that leads the student through the high school years. Appropriate **transition outcomes**

can include post-high school **education** like community colleges, four-year universities, trade schools and technical schools; vocational **training**, including programs funded through the Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation and Mental Health/Mental Retardation; **employment**, including supported employment; continuing and **adult education** program, including GED courses; **adult services** provided by agencies like the Offices of Vocational Rehabilitation, Mental Health/Mental Retardation and the Social Security Administration; and **independent** and **community living**.

Transition services can include instruction, related services, community experiences, and the development of employment skills and other post-school adult living objectives. When appropriate, transition services should also include activities to help the student acquire daily living skills, and can include functional vocational evaluation. For example, if a student with a disability will be living in a group home and participating in supportive employment, he or she may need to be taught activities of daily living, job skills, use of public transportation or the ability to handle money or go to the store. If the student will be attending post-secondary education or vocational education, the courses needed (which may include key academic courses, such as algebra, or even advanced placement courses) must be part of the student's program.

Good transition planning should also include teaching students "**self-advocacy skills**." Young people preparing to enter adult life need to be able to advocate for themselves throughout the transition planning process and after their public school experience ends. Young adults with disabilities who are effective self advocates understand their disabilities, the impact of the disabilities on their daily lives and the supports that they need to be successful in school, employment, and in the community. Self-advocacy skills include the ability to speak clearly about preferences, aptitudes, and abilities so that the resulting educational programming will be interesting to the student and appropriate. Ongoing, individualized assessment of the student can identify which self-advocacy skills need to be taught. Both parents and teachers can help the student improve self-advocacy skills.

WHO IS ENTITLED TO TRANSITION SERVICES, AND WHEN DO TRANSITION SERVICES BEGIN?

Beginning not later than the first Individualized Education Program (IEP) to be in effect when the student is **16**, the IEP must include **appropriate and measurable goals** for after the student leaves high school; the goals are updated each year. Transition goals must be based on **age-appropriate transition assessments** in the areas of training, education, employment, and, when appropriate, independent living skills. The IEP should also include the **transition services** (including courses of study) needed for the student to reach the transition goals. The IEP can list outside agencies that will provide services to help the student achieve her transition goals. When the student turns 17, the IEP Team must discuss whether voter registration is an appropriate community living and/or citizenship goal for the student. If it is, the IEP must explain when and how voter registration will be accomplished.

Think about transition early! If appropriate and measurable goals are to be in place when the student turns 16, planning and transition assessments should start earlier.

WHERE MUST TRANSITION SERVICES BE PROVIDED?

Transition services, like all other special education services, must be provided in the "least restrictive environment." This means that students with disabilities must receive transition services, to the maximum extent appropriate, with students who are not disabled in the regular education environment or in community settings. The location of the services should be clear in the IEP. Transition services and activities can take place in the school, community, employment site, and in vocational technical schools.

WHAT INFORMATION MUST BE GATHERED BEFORE RELEVANT TRANSITION PLANNING CAN BEGIN?

Transition services must be based on the individual student's strengths and needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests and the results of age-appropriate transition assessments relating to training, education,

employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills. The individualized assessment should provide an overall picture of the student, and should help the student and family decide what they want the student to do after leaving school.

Assessment information can be obtained through student and parent interviews, surveys, teacher questionnaires, observations of the student, and more formal assessments. If a student is interested in enrolling in a vocational technical program or school, a functional vocational assessment may need to be completed. Other ways to determine the student's needs and interests include focusing on the student's skills within certain environments (such as the home, school, and community) to determine the student's ability to deal with a variety of challenges in these areas; taking a work sample directly from a job the student is performing; observing the student while he or she is performing job-related skills in a job setting; and administering standardized tests, aptitude tests, interest tests, and individualized achievement tests.

WHO DECIDES WHAT THE TRANSITION OBJECTIVES AND SERVICES WILL BE?

The IEP Team determines what the transition goals and services for the student should be. In addition to the regular members of the IEP Team (including, of course, the parents), the student *must* be invited to take part in the transition planning. If the student does not attend the IEP meeting, the district must take other steps to ensure that the student's interests and preferences are considered.

Representatives from outside agencies, such as the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR), the County Offices of Mental Health/Mental Retardation (MH/MR), and other community service agencies should also be invited, if needed, to help identify and plan appropriate transition activities. In addition to helping schools, parents, and students plan transition activities in IEPs, OVR can accept student referrals from the student, a family member, or school personnel up to two years prior to graduation or earlier, and can help eligible students develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) before leaving the school setting. After the student leaves school, OVR can oversee the provision of employment and training services to the student, and can help the student address special needs and barriers to competitive employment.

HOW ARE TRANSITION GOALS AND SERVICES INCLUDED IN THE IEP?

If your child will be 16 when her IEP is in effect, the IEP Team should check the block in the "special considerations" section (Section I) indicating that the student is entitled to transition services. The Team should then fill out Section IV, indicating the student's and family's transition goals and services in post-secondary education and training, employment, and independent living (if appropriate). For each transition outcome and service the Team should note the location, frequency, expected length, the agency responsible (which can include outside agencies), when services will begin, and whether the outcome will be achieved through one of the instructional goals in the IEP. Remember, the goals should be based upon previously conducted transition assessments.

WHAT HAPPENS IF AN OUTSIDE AGENCY ON WHICH THE FAMILY AND THE SCHOOL DISTRICT HAVE RELIED DOESN'T DO ITS JOB?

If an outside agency does not provide the transition services listed in the IEP, the school district must bring the IEP Team together again to decide what other strategies can be used to meet the student's transition goals.

HOW CAN A TRANSITIONING STUDENT BECOME MORE INVOLVED IN DEVELOPING THE TRANSITION PLAN?

The law requires that school districts invite students with disabilities to participate in transition planning for their IEPs, and students should be encouraged to attend. The student is in the best position to voice her needs, strengths, preferences and interests so that the IEP Team can develop good transition goals and services that will be interesting and appropriate for the student.

Parents, teachers and other members of the IEP Team can help the student become more involved in developing the transition plan by employing the principals of *self-determination*. This requires an understanding of, and commitment to, the following principles as a student selects from an array of potential transition services: **Choice**: Students have the right to choose how they will live their lives, including where they will live in the community and what post-school outcomes they will pursue. **Relationships**: Those with whom students have the closest

relationships are in the best position to provide the strength, assistance, and security necessary for the students to thrive in their adult lives, and those relationships must be treasured, nurtured, and protected. Students must also be permitted to develop new relationships as they attempt to expand their circles of support. **Contribution and Community:** All students, regardless of the nature and extent of their disabilities, can contribute to their community in a meaningful way and must be helped to develop a sense of community belonging and identity. **Roles and Responsibilities:** Students, as they take greater control over their lives and resources, must be permitted to assume greater responsibility for their decisions and actions. **Control:** Students must have the power to make important decisions and truly control their own lives. **Dreams:** All people have hopes and dreams, and students should be provided with opportunities that enable them to begin the journey towards their own dreams. **Dignity and Respect:** All people have an inherent right to be treated with dignity and respect, and students must be allowed to take risks and make mistakes. **Attitude:** Nothing is impossible. Students and their circles of support must replace "No, we can't" with "How can we?"

WHAT IS A "SUMMARY OF PERFORMANCE"?

When a student with an IEP exits from the school system through graduation or completion of the school year in which she turns 21, the school district must provide the student with a summary of her academic achievement and functional performance. The summary must also include recommendations on how to assist the student in meeting her post-school transition goals. If the school district, the family, and the student have successfully identified annual transition goals and services, conducted appropriate assessments, monitored the student's progress toward the transition goals, and collected progress data, the school district will be able to provide the student with the information needed to move forward towards her post-school goals.

WHAT CAN YOU DO IF YOU DISAGREE WITH THE TRANSITION COMPONENT OF YOUR CHILD'S IEP?

As a student gets older, her interests may change, and new transition goals and activities may need to be set. That is why the transition component of the IEP

must be updated annually. Transition goals should be realistic, but they should also be based on high expectations for the student. If you believe that the transition outcomes and services the school district is proposing for your child's IEP are not appropriate (too low, too high, not enough or the wrong kind of services) for your child, you can ask the school district to "mediate" the dispute or you can request a pre-hearing conference or an impartial hearing. For more information on dispute resolution options, see ELC's Fact Sheet *Resolving Special Education Disputes*. This fact sheet and other ELC publications are available from our website or phone numbers listed below.

FOR MORE INFORMATION YOU MAY WANT TO TRY:

Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PATTAN)
Office of Dispute Resolution
Toll Free 800-360-7282
TTY 800-654-5984
www.pattan.k12.pa.us

Pennsylvania Department of Education
Bureau of Special Education
717-783-6913
TTD 717-787-7367
www.pde.state.pa.us

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